



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Freedom of the Media in Armenia

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 27, 2011

We take note of the December 16 decision by Armenia's National Commission on TV and Radio awarding 18 ten-year licenses that will shape Armenia's media environment for the next decade, a period encompassing the next two cycles of national elections for the Armenian parliament and president. We note that the number of licenses awarded is less than the current number of broadcasters and we are concerned about the implications of the tender process on media pluralism.

While we welcomed the formation of the Working Group tasked by President Sargsian in September 2010 to review the June 2010 amendments to Armenia's Law on Television and Radio, we do have concerns about the pace of the review.

We also remain concerned that an audit of Armenia's TV and radio frequencies, which provides the technical basis for limiting the number of digital broadcasting licenses, has not been released.

We commend President Sargsian's statements on December 18 committing Armenian authorities to "display utmost tolerance toward dissent" and remarking that "European democracy and rule of law are demands" of Armenian society. Independent, pluralistic media in which diverse opinions can be freely discussed is a critical component for a prosperous democracy.

All OSCE participating States have undertaken commitments to respect and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression and media freedom.

In view of the Armenian government's stated commitment to freedom of expression and media freedom, we urge the government of Armenia to amend the Law on TV and Radio and to conduct the digital switchover process in a manner that promotes media pluralism in Armenia and expands the Armenian public's access to information from diverse sources.

In order to ensure Armenian legislation conforms to international standards and OSCE commitments, we urge the government of Armenia to release the frequency audit and further amend the Law on Television and Radio by taking into account the recommendations of the OSCE, including its Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Council of Europe.

We further urge Armenian authorities to liberalize the licensing regime for other telecommunications media, including for providers of Internet, satellite and mobile phone networks so that media can easily deliver content to Armenian citizens. We also urge the government to consider allowing all existing broadcast license holders and applicants for new broadcast licenses to utilize unallocated analog frequencies until the cessation of analog broadcasting in Armenia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.